

The Warrior

N. Diane Holmes puts a face—and a lot of pink trimming—on the fight against breast cancer

BY LYNNE MARGOLIS

When it comes to sporting pink, Barbie's got nothing on N. Diane Holmes. Since conquering breast cancer—twice—Holmes has raised over \$150,000 for various cancer nonprofits, while becoming an outspoken advocate for education and early detection. She draws attention to her message via permutations of pink—in everything from wigs to socks, sunglasses to sashes, feather boas to bedazzled bras.

"If I can put a face on [battling cancer] to make sure that people take care of themselves and do what they need to do," she says, "I'm happy to do that."

Unlike some, she doesn't call herself a survivor. "I am a breast cancer warrior," she declares. "I beat it."

The Orlando family law attorney received her first diagnosis at age 38, after her gynecologist felt a lump during an annual exam. After a mastectomy, she was cancer-free for 13 years, when cancer appeared in her other breast. That was 17 years ago, and since a second mastectomy, she's been cancer-free.

After her first bout, Holmes became a volunteer for the American Cancer Society's Reach to Recovery, offering support to others, and joined ACS's annual Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk, becoming one of its top fundraisers. She also works as an advocate with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, including lobbying at the state Capitol and speaking to media in support of bills to fund diagnostic follow-ups and early detection. Holmes also devotes time to Libby's Legacy Breast Cancer Foundation and has represented



Holmes with Orlando Mayor Buddy Deyer at the 2019 Making Strides Against Cancer walk (left).

survivors in the NCAA's annual Cure Bowl football game.

"I realized that, having been given the gift of life, I wanted to make that the best it could be—for me and everyone else in my life," she says.

Holmes had a track record of volunteerism well before adopting her new favorite color. She became a guardian ad litem court representative for abused, neglected or abandoned children while working at her first job, with the Orange County Bar Association's Legal Aid Society, in the early 1980s. She brings her focus on support and collaboration into her law practice as well.

Holmes is also committed to mentoring women in the field of law. In 2004, she hosted the first Central Florida Association for Women Lawyers' Table for Eight dinner, an event designed to help women attorneys of varying experience levels establish more supportive connections than they might at larger networking events.

"The idea was to be in a more intimate atmosphere, where you could actually get to know people individually," Holmes says.

Holmes co-founded that association as well as the Central Florida Family Law Inn, which gathers lawyers and judges together to break bread, share educational opportunities and, she says, "promote civility and professionalism."

One of her proudest affiliations is with the Florida Lawyers Assistance Program, which helps legal professionals experiencing problems with drugs or alcohol. Decades ago, that described her.

"Because I received a lot of help, I provide help to others by facilitating a weekly group and being available to my colleagues as a contact person for the organization," Holmes says.

Just as with her breast cancer experiences, Holmes is open about her recovery journey.

"I routinely talk about my participation in the program at Bar association gatherings and with members of the bench," she says, "because it helps somebody who may be having a problem to know that there's a face, not just a phone number." **SL**



N. Diane Holmes
N. Diane Holmes P.A.;
Family Law; Orlando

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The Stats

- Except for skin cancers, breast cancer is the most common cancer in U.S. women.
- This year, about 310,720 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in U.S. women.
- About 42,250 U.S. women will die from breast cancer this year.
- The median age for breast cancer is 62.
- Incidence rates have risen .6% per year in recent years.
- Breast cancer death rates have gone down since 1989, with an overall decline of 42% through 2021.

Source: The American Cancer Society

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